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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

United Nations information centres in 1992: allocation of resources

Report of the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. In paragraph 8 of resolution 47/73 B of 14 December 1992, the General Assembly requested "the Secretary-General to study ways and means of redressing differences in the allocation of resources, in particular the differences of support, in relation to the financing of United Nations information centres in various countries", and to report to the Committee on Information at its fifteenth session.

2. The previous year, in paragraph 1 (k) of resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested "the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at all sessions of the Committee on the budget of each of the United Nations information centres, including detailed information on the level of assistance being provided by the host countries".

3. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in response to the above-mentioned requests which are related. It includes: (a) ongoing efforts to strengthen the information centres within available resources; (b) funding provided to each centre from the United Nations regular budget in 1992 (excluding staff costs); and (c) extent of host government contributions received in kind and/or cash for 1992.

4. The report also highlights the cooperation and support needed from every host Government to enable the Secretary-General to "study ways and means of redressing differences in the allocation of resources" in relation to the financing of United Nations information centres in various countries.

5. The report does not deal with the United Nations information services at Geneva and Vienna, which have their own budgets and staffing posts within the

direct management and supervision of the Department. Nor does it deal with the information services of the four regional commissions, which operate within the administrative and budgetary jurisdiction of the commissions, while undertaking local public information activities on behalf of the Department of Public Information.

Functions performed by information centres

6. The United Nations information centres are one of the most important means of disseminating information about the United Nations and for creating greater public understanding of, and support for, the Organization. They perform an increasing range of public information and promotional services tailored to the local interest of the media and the target audiences, including newsletters and press releases in national languages.

7. The activities of all United Nations information centres are in keeping with the guidelines provided by the Committee on Information and approved by the General Assembly in resolution 42/162 A of 8 December 1987. Paragraph 1, recommendation (36) of the resolution requests, inter alia, that the United Nations information centres continue:

(a) To assist press and information media in their respective countries in accordance with the mandates given by the General Assembly;

(b) To intensify direct and systematic communication exchange with local information and educational institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a mutually beneficial way;

(c) To ensure open and unhindered access by all people to all United Nations information centres and to all materials distributed through them;

(d) To establish close coordination, taking into account the functional autonomy of United Nations information centres, with other field offices of the United Nations system, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in order to avoid duplication of work.

8. The information centres mobilize national information media, government agencies and NGOs, academic institutions and special interest groups in celebrating international days, years and decades mandated by the General Assembly.

9. As a result of rapid developments in the geopolitical priorities of the international community, the information centres are increasingly called upon to provide information, logistical and other support for the peacemaking and peace-keeping missions of the Organization and for the activities of the Secretary-General.

10. An important aspect of centre activities is to provide Headquarters with feedback on national media coverage and public comments pertaining to the United Nations in general, the Secretary-General, as well as other important issues that have a bearing on the work of the Organization.

11. The information centres service the Secretary-General and other senior officials of the Organization, particularly during visits to their region.

12. They also act as a focal point for the United Nations system, providing administrative and liaison services in countries where there is no local office of UNDP.

Strengthening of the United Nations information centres during 1992

13. The Department's ongoing efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of information centres within existing resources included enhancing electronic communications capabilities and training programmes for staff.

14. The computerization of United Nations information centres continued during 1992 and action has been initiated to provide suitable equipment during 1993 to the remaining 12 centres that are still without computers.

15. Electronic mail was installed and made operational in Cairo, Islamabad, New Delhi, Panama City, Port of Spain and Prague. At present, 27 centres have the service and others continue to make regular checks of access to public international data networks and local telecommunications conditions needed to ensure electronic mail connections with Headquarters.

16. Forty-two centres have their own fully operational facsimile machines and others have access to UNDP equipment and services.

17. A total of 168 staff from 32 centres completed local training in computer applications such as DOS, WordPerfect, Lotus and dBase by the end of 1992. The training programmes were financed by the Office of Human Resources and Management, whose continuing support has been sought to train additional staff during 1993.

18. Special briefings were arranged for Reference Assistants of the centres in the Americas region in Santiago in March 1992, and for Reference Assistants of the centres located in Asia and the Pacific region in Bangkok in January 1993.

19. The Department continues its efforts to establish the National Information Officer category for the information centres. The Department believes that the appointment of qualified local staff with professional media expertise would be beneficial for the information centres.

20. A major aspect of closer working relations in the field with other members of the United Nations family is the Secretary-General's initiative to integrate some information centres with UNDP field offices, wherever feasible. As requested by the General Assembly, a full and separate report on the integration project is before the Committee. 1/

21. Further cooperation continues to be pursued directly with each member of the United Nations family and through the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC). It will be recalled that all JUNIC members have praised the cooperation and support provided by the information centres and decided that

those members requiring specific services would reserve funds in their respective budgets to cover any costs incurred by the centres in this regard. Consultations continue with parties concerned with a view to obtaining reimbursement.

Regular budget resources allocated to the United Nations information centres in 1992

22. Funds for the maintenance and upkeep of the information centres remain extremely limited. To the maximum extent possible, non-staff operating resources are allocated equitably to all centres on a pragmatic basis. In this connection, the fact that some receive higher allocations in dollar terms is primarily attributable to the fact that they are located in high-cost locations. A breakdown of regular budget resources allocated to individual centres during 1992, excluding staff costs, is provided in the table below.

23. Particular attention should be given to the fact that the operating costs for every centre, even in cases where the host government financial support is anticipated, have to be provided initially from the Department's regular budget. In due course, regular budget expenditures can be offset as appropriate only when a host Government's annual contribution is received and credited at United Nations Headquarters. However, there is no fixed timetable for such recovery of expenditures. Further, the level of host government contributions fluctuates and cannot be projected with accuracy.

24. The resulting uncertainties in receipt of extrabudgetary resources mean that the Department is required to absorb an increasing amount of centre expenditures within the regular budget funding, the bulk of which is primarily for maintenance and upkeep of the centre, including rental and maintenance of premises, utilities, communications, maintenance of equipment, local transportation, stationery and office supplies, library supplies, office and electronic equipment, freight and handling charges for shipment of equipment and supplies.

25. The limited resources available to the Department seriously curtail the ability of United Nations information centres to expand their public information activities. The centres have to rely more and more on the active support and cooperation of national Governments, national United Nations associations and other NGOs, educational institutions and other local interest groups to help promote wider public awareness and understanding of the United Nations.

26. Such local support has been forthcoming in many instances. Some centre Directors, for example, are able to increase their participation in special events because local organizations arranging the events are prepared to cover all travel and related costs. In addition, a number of centres have been able to adapt and produce more United Nations information material in national languages for local dissemination with the financial and other practical support of Governments and local institutions. Some Governments have also provided computer equipment and the services of local personnel.

Host government support for the information centres

27. During the early years of the Organization, United Nations information centres were financed completely out of the United Nations regular budget, supplemented in some cases by voluntary host government support of either rent-free office premises or some financial support, or both. Centres were opened on the basis of informal understandings with host Governments and there were no signed agreements.

28. Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959, which, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General "to enlist the cooperation of Member States concerned in providing all possible facilities for the establishment of ... new centres", the Department began to ask Member States requesting the establishment of a centre to indicate the extent of their support in written agreements signed between the United Nations and the host Government.

29. Over the years, the ad hoc support received from host Governments has varied. Many host Governments continue to provide invaluable assistance for the information centres in cash and/or kind. At the same time, the level of funds provided by other Governments has either remained the same or even decreased. A number of them continue to be in arrears, and a few have ceased providing financial support altogether. Many Governments continue to provide no support at all.

30. During 1992, 23 Governments provided rent-free office premises, 6 provided both rent-free premises and cash contributions, and 10 provided cash contributions only. Expected cash contributions were not received from 14 Governments, some of whom provided rent-free premises. Eighteen Governments did not provide any support (a breakdown of government support for 1992 is contained in the table below).

31. Consequently, the overall situation continues to be critical, as the Department is being called upon to absorb an increasing amount of extrabudgetary funds not received.

Redressing differences in allocation of resources

32. As the Committee is aware, the Secretary-General's plan of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP wherever feasible is to be evaluated after a trial period of one year. This would be a timely opportunity for the Department to undertake a more comprehensive study of redressing differences in the allocation of resources.

33. The Department's experience over the years has shown that when expected financial support from host Governments for local operating costs and extrabudgetary staff costs are either inadequate or are not forthcoming, those centres would not be able to fully provide the services expected of them. In addition, the work of other centres is adversely affected as the limited regular budget funds would have to be redeployed to cover unreceived government funds.

34. Efforts continue in order to obtain support from host Governments in a realistic and timely manner and, in particular, to obtain commitments for assistance from those host Governments that do not provide any assistance and have not signed agreements. Although the latter efforts have not been successful in most cases, two host Governments recently responded most favourably.

35. The Greek Government signed an agreement in October 1992 which includes provision of an annual financial contribution to cover rental of office premises for the information centre in Athens, beginning in 1993. The Italian Government, which already provides rent-free office premises, initiated parliamentary action which would allow it to sign an agreement and provide annual financial support as well for the information centre in Rome.

36. A principal means of redressing differences in the allocation of resources to all centres is effective and meaningful support from every host Government on an assured, realistic and continuing basis. Governments that are in arrears need to bring their payments to date. On the other hand, Governments that have decreased the level of support need to be more realistic in their contributions. And most certainly it would be very helpful if Governments that do not provide any support would undertake to do so.

37. Equally important, an essential prerequisite for the establishment of new information centres and information components, as well as for the enhancement of existing centres, must be General Assembly approval and provision of the additional staffing and financial resources needed for the purpose. It is not realistic to expect the Department to implement such requests within existing resources.

38. The Department also invites the Committee on Information to consider what measures should be taken in cases where there is no host government support and when such support is inadequate for agreed purposes.

Notes

1/ A/AC.198/1993/__.

Allocation of United Nations regular budget funds and host Government assistance

31 December 1992

Centre	Established	Director	UN Regular Budget funds for 1992 (excluding staff costs)	Host Government Support			
				Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary staff costs	Cash contribution for 1992 (US$)
Accra	March 58	DPI	22,900		yes		nil
Algiers	Sept. 83	UNDP	23,700		yes		nil
Ankara	March 75	UNDP	24,800	January 75	no		not received
Antananarivo	January 63	UNDP	12,800		no		nil
Asuncion	October 62	UNDP	19,400		no		nil
Athens a/	April 54	DPI	104,800	October 92	no		nil
Beirut	Sept. 82	DPI	27,800		no		not received
Belgrade	Nov. 50	DPI	81,900	Sept. 83	yes		nil
Santa Fe de Bogota	May 54	DPI	144,000	1955	no		$70,000
Brazzaville	June 83	DPI	67,300	June 83	yes		nil
Brussels	January 75	DPI	194,300	January 78	no		$63,971,000
Bucharest	June 70	UNDP	17,800	April 70	yes	5 local level	$7,575.76
Buenos Aires	Nov. 48	DPI	143,100		yes	1 local level	$70,000.00
Bujumbura	June 61	UNDP	42,800		yes		not received
Cairo	April 49	UNDP	37,200		no		$240.72
Colombo	August 61	UNDP	12,700		yes		not received
Copenhagen	Dec. 46	DPI	92,000	January 89	no		$41,435.15
Dakar	April 64	DPI	27,400		yes		not received
Dar-es-Salaam	June 61	UNDP	30,000	1961	yes		nil
Dhaka	August 81	UNDP	51,500	August 81	no		$2,597.40
Harare	Nov. 1982	DPI	21,300		yes		nil
Islamabad	March 51	DPI	36,700		no		$6,880.00
Jakarta	August 85 (re-opened)	DPI	54,600		yes	Services of Watchman	nil
Kabul	October 59	UNDP	8,000		no		not received
Kathmandu	April 64	UNDP	8,400		no		$3,600

a/ Greek Government provided ad hoc voluntary contribution equivalent to US$ 76,000 to cover renovation of UNIC premises resulting from bomb explosion and damage in 1991. Government to provide annual financial contribution as of 1993.

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Centre	Established	Director	UN Regular Budget funds for 1992 (excluding staff costs)	Host Government Support			
				Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary staff costs	Cash contribution for 1992 (US$)
Khartoum	October 63	DPI	32,900	May 63	yes		not received
Kinshasa	July 64	UNDP	22,500		no		nil
Lagos	May 67	DPI	73,400	Nov. 64	yes	2 local level	not received
La Paz	Sept. 63	UNDP	23,600		no		nil
Lima [b/]	April 60	UN	90,300		no		nil
Lisbon	Nov. 77	DPI	70,600	Sept.78	yes	2 local level	not received
Lome	May 62	UNDP	13,200		yes		nil
London	January 47	DPI	458,800		no		nil
Lusaka	October 75	DPI	61,000		yes		nil
Madrid	May 86	DPI	133,300		yes	1 local level	$69,000.00
Managua	July 84	UNDP	30,000	April 84	yes	3 local level	$20,000.00
Manama	Nov. 77	DPI	28,500	Dec.74 & Jan.77	yes	P-4 3 local level	$33,000 from Bahrain. Funds not received from Qatar & UAE
Manila	August 53	DPI	64,200	1977	yes		nil
Maseru	Feb. 79	UNDP	7,000		yes		nil
Mexico City	August 47	DPI	96,100		no		nil
Monrovia [c/]	October 50	UNDP			no		nil
Moscow	April 48	DPI	81,100		no		nil
Nairobi	August 74	DPI	40,400	Nov. 74	no		not received
New Delhi	January 47	DPI	49,500		no		nil
Ouagadougou	April 82	DPI	59,900	June 82	yes		nil
Panama City	Sept. 84	UNDP	32,200	October 82	yes	Services of 3 local level	nil
Paris	March 47	DPI	81,000		no		nil
Port of Spain	January 62	DPI	67,300	1961	no		$2,823.53
Prague	Dec. 47	DPI	54,700		no		nil
Rabat	Dec. 62	DPI	59,500		no		$6,850.00
Rio de Janeiro	March 47	DPI	74,200	1961 & 1963	yes		not received

b/ Director of Regional Disarmament Centre serves as Director UNIC.

c/ Reactivation of operational UNIC under way.

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Centre	Established	Director	UN Regular Budget funds for 1992 (excluding staff costs)	Host Government Support			
				Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary staff costs	Cash contribution for 1992 (US$)
Rome	July 58	DPI	83,400		yes		nil
San Salvador d/	July 60	UNDP			no		nil
Sydney	Nov. 48	DPI	114,200		no		nil
Tehran e/	May 50	UNDP	8,500		no		nil
Tokyo f/	April 58	DPI	293,400		no		nil
Tripoli	January 80	DPI	108,700	May 77	yes	P-5 5 local level	$275,800
Tunis	May 60	DPI	51,400		yes		nil
Washington	October 46	DPI	188,300		no		nil
Yangon	June 59	UNDP	19,400		no		nil
Yaounde	October 65	DPI	53,800		yes	2 local level	not received

d/ DPI public information activities undertaken in collaboration with ONUSAL at present time.

e/ Full reactivation with DPI Director and host government support under discussion.

f/ Government of Japan provides annual contribution equivalent to US$ 100,000 for Trust Fund for Expansion of Public Information Activities in Japan.